

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
#394**

**FRED "FRITZ" STANLEY BERTSCH, JR.
USS *CASE*, SURVIVOR**

**INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 5, 2001
BY DONALD D. FRASER**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

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**USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

Donald D. Fraser (DD): This oral history interview is being conducted by Captain Donald D. Fraser, United States Naval Reserve in support of the National Park Service and the USS *Arizona* Memorial at the Ala Moana Hotel in Honolulu, 5 December 2001 at approximately 6:45 p.m. The individual being interviewed is Mr. Fred Stanley Bertsch,[/r.] who was an ensign aboard USS *Case*, DD-370, on December 7, 1941.

Captain Bertsch, for the record, please state your full name, your place of birth and your birth date.

Fred Stanley Bertsch, Jr. (FB): My name is Fred Stanley Bertsch, Jr. I was born in Chicago, Illinois on October 8, 1920.

DD: And what did you consider to be your hometown in 1941?

FB: My hometown was Holland, Michigan.

DD: And what are the names of your parents?

FB: My parents were Fred S. Bertsch and Martha Elsie Beck Bertsch.

DD: And did you have any brothers or sisters?

FB: Had one brother, Charles D. Bertsch, now long deceased.

DD: Was he older or younger?

FB: He was three and a half years older than I.

DD: Where did you go to high school?

FB: Holland High School in Holland, Michigan.

DD: And what was your commissioning source? How did you happen to join the navy?

FB: Well, I had a lifelong ambition to be a naval officer, if you can have a lifelong ambition as a young man. But that was what I did. And I might interject that as a junior high school student, in a civics class, I wrote a paper on being a naval officer and while I got an "A" on the paper, [*when*] it came back, the teacher [*noted on it that she*] was very disappointed in me that I would [*seek*] such a hostile and unpeacelike position as an ambition. That struck me as a rather negative thing to say, at that time. But that was the attitude of the nation at that time. Of course, that was 1933, I would guess, or '34.

DD: I asked what—how did you get your commission?

FB: Oh, I'm sorry. I was a student at Hope College and pursuing my ambition. I had not been selected for the Naval Academy and the opportunity arose to enlist as an apprentice seaman in the naval reserve with a view to becoming an officer by going through midshipman training, which I proceeded to do. [*I*] went on a V-7 cruise during my summer vacation in 1940. And then I had the option of going to the USS *Illinois* [*BB-7*] and being commissioned as a ninety-day wonder, but [*I*] elected to go back to my senior year in college and get my degree. And as it turned out, I did get my degree but I graduated in absentia because I was called to active duty in late May of 1941. The college did agree to grant me my degree and I reported for active duty at the USS, it was *Illinois* and then became the USS *Prairie State* [*IX-15*] in New York City and was commissioned in September 12, 1941. I believe [*I received*] seven days leave at that time and then took the train out to San Diego, where I joined the USS *Case*, DD-370, as an assistant engineer.

The ship left almost immediately at the end of what was then called a “play wave” to [*return*] to its base in Pearl Harbor. And that’s how I happened to be in Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack.

DD: How long was *Case*—when did you arrive in Honolulu, in Hawaii?

FB: Well, whatever the transit time was from [*San Diego*]. [*It was*] probably around the first of October 1941. And we were in and out of Pearl Harbor, had maneuvers and in fact were on maneuvers the week preceding the attack. [*We*] had come in for a period of maintenance, alongside the USS *Whitney* [*AD-4*], and thus were largely broken down at the time of the attack.

DD: Before we get into that, I’m curious to know a little bit about what your impressions of Hawaii might have been and of Honolulu and...

FB: Oh well...

DD: ...a young man out of the Midwest and here you are in...

FB: Well, it was a wonderland. We had, of course, weekends and every weekend we, when we didn’t have the duty, were free to adventure out into the city, to Waikiki, out to Kailua and Kaneohe and so on, and we did. It was a very relaxed atmosphere [in] remarkable contrast with what it is today. The high-tension atmosphere in Honolulu today is shattering. It was shorts and aloha shirts all the way. People welcoming us into their homes and it was just a marvelous thing. I can tell you things about that too that—I guess it’s no big secret, the reason I was aboard ship on December 7 is that a group of us from the nest of destroyers would rent one room at the Moana. And of course the only

three hotels at that time were the Moana, the Royal Hawaiian and Halekulani—[*and*] dwarfed today.

Anyway, we'd have about ten guys [*and*] would rent one room. One guy would rent the room and ten guys occupied it at the Moana. We lived on our 140 dollars a month. And quite well.

The reason I was aboard ship [*was that*] the gunnery officer [*who*] was the third senior officer on the ship, had a date [*on the Saturday night a week before the attack,*] and [*he*] was sitting down in the Banyan Court [*with his date. We spotted him from our room overlooking the scene, and*] I thought it would be quite an interesting thing to grab one of those banyan fronds and swing down on it across his table, between him and his date, which I did! And so I was restricted to the ship and that's why I was the senior engineer officer on board, even though I was a junior ensign! That's the end of that story.

DD: That's a good story. So it was very pleasant. It was...

FB: Oh, just such a contrast with today. Laid-back, I think, would be the word of the day.

DD: What was the sense, I mean, as you would've been a college graduate, you were well aware of the international tensions...

FB: Very much so.

DD: You know what Japan was doing in China. But here in Hawaii, I'm trying to understand the, what might the attitude have been militarily. You must have felt safe here to have been so relaxed? And when I say you, I mean the whole—what was [*the*] sense?

FB: Yes, and yet, as I told you earlier, on the sixth of December, as was the custom then, we had military inspection. We had an inspection [*both personnel and material*]. The captain's custom was after the personnel inspection to muster the crew aft and chat with 'em a little bit. He did a wonderful job of it. On that particular occasion, and I can quote him almost exactly, he said, "We're out here for a purpose. We're a deterrent to the Japanese in their advances. And I know it's a hardship on you."

The enlisted men, almost without exception, did not have their families out there. Some of the more senior officers did, including our commanding officer and the executive officer.

He said, "I know this is a hardship. But we're out here for a real purpose and we may never be attacked here, but on the other hand the Japanese may be here and attack us at eight o'clock tomorrow morning." He was only off by five minutes.

I want to tell you that the crew just worshipped that man. I don't think the general attitude was one of complacency, but it wasn't one of constant alert either. And one of the problems of history, that we're still working on, is why in the world were all the other forward stations—the Philippines, Wake [*Island*], everywhere else—[*given*] a war warning and had the Purple code, [*but Pearl Harbor did not?*] The commanding general and admiral here did not have [*the Purple code*]. I won't get into that any further than that, but that's one of the real problems of history at this point.

DD: *Case's* captain was?

FB: [*Lieutenant*] Commander R. W. Bedilion, [*B-E-D-I-L-I-O-N*]. Tragically he was killed about a year later so—not in the *Case*. He was relieved when we were up in Alaska and he was in [*an*] aircraft accident in the States.

DD: So you've certainly felt a sense of purpose in your service and as you say, there wasn't a sense of complacency. There was an understanding of the conditions. But here in Hawaii—well, maybe, your statement what the C.O.'s statement was, that the Japanese could attack in X number of hours. It's obviously prophetic, but it also seems unique. I mean, I wonder how many other officers may have felt that way.

FB: Well, of course, I was a very junior officer at the time. But I can tell you that I had been the editor of the college newspaper and the attitude of much of the nation was that these things will not happen to us. Holland, Michigan at that time was about ninety-five percent pure Netherlands Dutch. And at the time, two months, let's say, before the German invasion of the Netherlands, the lowlands, in 1940, the attitude was, oh, we don't have anything to do with that. But once the Germans hit the Netherlands, and the lowlands in general, the whole attitude was, "Well, why don't we go and get those people!"

And that's the way it is. We had a similar incident this last September [11th *with the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon*]. Everybody sitting back. We don't like the military. We don't like this. We don't like that, cut 'em and so on. And then all of a sudden, something happens and then it's Tommy Atkins all over again. So here we are.

DD: Mm-hmm. So you were in hack, so to speak, that weekend?

FB: Yes, yes. Informal but nevertheless there.

DD: And you had the duty?

FB: I had the duty.

DD: And you were the senior engineer...

FB: I was the only engineer officer aboard. Oh, at that time, I was the third [*in line*]. There was the engineer officer, [*a*] first assistant and I was the [*second*] assistant. Three months later, I was the chief engineer. That's how things go under those circumstances. The engineer officer went off to flight training. The [*first assistant*] engineer became the gunnery officer and I became the engineer officer. There I was, a kid just twenty-one years old and I had a hundred and some men under me and—as I remember a 160,000 horsepower [*power plant*]. It was some responsibility.

DD: And what was the condition of *Case* that weekend?

FB: Well, we were in a maintenance status. We had come in and gone alongside the *Whitney*, AD-4. We were the sixth ship outboard. All of our division was there, except for the *Shaw* [DD-393], which had had a minor collision with the *Sabine* [AO-25], [*so*] it was in the floating dry dock [YFD-2] and [*incidentally had taken*] our availability. Had we had our availability and had I been where I was in the ship at that time, I wouldn't be here talking to you. But in any event, we had all the stops out of our auxiliary steam line. We had ten feet of our fire and flushing line out, [*and much more*]. And as soon as the attack started, the *Whitney* cut off all services to us—electricity, steam, flushing water, whatever else. And so we were on cold iron, trying to put the ship together.

DD: Now, you're outboard of *Whitney* and outboard of five other destroyers, where—you're on the shipyard side of Pearl Harbor, opposite...

FB: We're at berth Xray-[8]. So we're looking—I don't know whether they changed the berth [*number*], the buoy number or not. I don't know. In any event, [*we were*] off the starboard quarter, [*of*] the *Arizona* [BB-39], to the northwest, it would be, maybe 500 [- 1000] yards, something

like [*that. In*] in any event, [*we could look*] right down the row of ships including the *Raleigh* [CL-7], the *Detroit* [CL-8], the *Utah* [IX-16] and so on. From that direction, we're looking at the *Arizona* and the *Vestal* [AR-4] over here and the battle line down that side of Ford Island. That's where we were.

DD: Okay.

FB: At that time berth Xray-[8, *in a nest with USS Whitney and four other destroyers*].

DD: Sunday morning, you're up now, or you're still in your stateroom or...

FB: I was scheduled to take our football team over to play a Marine team in Ewa [*at the Ewa Marine Corps Air Station*]. And so I was shaving. And just about ready to go. The whaleboat was alongside and I was aware of that. I had just finished shaving and that's when our forward 1.1[*inch*] weapons started firing, followed almost immediately by general quarters. I went down the starboard side of the ship toward my battle station, which was the engine room. It was only a single engine room in those ships. Two fire rooms and a single engine room. Not the best design maybe, *Mahan* class destroyer. And when I got to the starboard torpedo tubes, this dive bomber [*passed,*] throttle[*d*] back, over our stern with his canopy pushed back and our after fifty-caliber machine guns, were already firing on [*it*]. And it's somewhat amazing that they could do that [*so soon after the initial attack*]. Of course we couldn't use our five-inch at all or anything like that [*since the tender had cut off all services*].

Interesting thing about that is—and again, funny, in a way—our nest got, (is credited with) six of the [29] Japanese planes shot down that day. These, I think, [*were*] primarily

dive bombers, [*which*] when they pulled out, came across our stern. We didn't get that particular one, but our nest in total got six of the [*twenty-nine*—if my memory is correct. We got six of 'em, just with machine gun fire. No 5inch[/38 caliber guns] or anything. And the funny thing about it is that five of the six ships eventually got under way and left port and didn't get back for a considerable period of time. One ship—[*I*] hate to [*mention this*—I think it was the *Cummings*—claimed all six of the planes, and I think were officially credited with 'em, and that's that, but that's the way life goes. (Clears throat)

DD: So on your way—your battle station was?

FB: The engine room.

DD: The engine room. So, you are, on coming down the...

FB: Starboard side of the ship.

DD: ...starboard side.

FB: Toward, there was only one hatch, it was on the port side but I'm going aft on the starboard side. And this plane flew past us and...

DD: Now I believe you were telling me earlier, this was the plane or you saw the plane that put the bomb...

FB: Oh, it was not that plane.

DD: Oh, I beg your pardon...

FB: No, later, after I had been at my battle station for some time and saw that things were going well there, I knew that these auxiliary steam stops were largely in the firerooms and it was crucial that we get those back in. So I was en route

from the engine room to get to the firerooms. You had to come up on the main deck to get anywhere on those ships in those days. So at that point, I was at the top of the engine room hatch and this dive-bomber attack was going on on the battle line, including the *Arizona*, which was clearly in sight, as I say. Whether it was 500 yards or 1000 yards, I'm not here to swear. But very clearly this dive-bomber made its run and if it weren't...*[for extensive evidence to the contrary, I would have sworn, it went right down her stack]*.

(Conversation off-mike)

FB: Sorry about that. I get kind of long-winded.

DD: Okay. Okay. So you were concerned about the auxiliary steam stops?

FB: Yes. And I was at the top of the engine room hatch when there was this series of dive bombing attacks on the battle line including the *Arizona* and I wanted—you know, you're naturally going to take a look and I did and this dive bomber made its run on the *Arizona* and I would've sworn—and if it weren't disproved by history, I guess—that that bomb, which I could clearly see, went right down the stack of the *Arizona*. Well, I guess it did not but I was deceived. In any event, the forward magazine of the *Arizona* went 'Boom" and [a] whole bunch of debris and stuff, the whole bottom of Pearl Harbor it seemed went up in the air some hundreds of feet. As I told you earlier, [*when*] the Captain [*Lieutenant Commander*] Bedilion came back to the ship later he said that Fritz was still standing at the top of the hatch waiting for all those bodies and debris to come down, but that of course was not the case. I proceeded to try to get the ship back together, which we did.

DD: Two things real quick. You were the only engineer officer aboard that morning?

FB: That's correct.

DD: Things are unfolding. Did you think about that? Holy smokes, you know, I'm—my boss isn't here, we're under attack and...

FB: No. The wonderful thing is at that time we had marvelous, marvelous petty officers. Not that they're not today. I don't decry that. But we had some of our petty officers were college graduates. We were blessed with a chief machinist mate, Chief Brown, who had gone into the fleet reserve, perhaps in 1930 or something like that. He was really an old man for a tin can sailor. He was, I think, in his middle fifties. He knew everything. And we had other. We had petty officers who were college graduates. We were in a deep depression and had been for years and years. And that's how the navy benefited in many ways from those people. But because of the needs—and I'm digressing, I know...

DD: No, go on.

FB: ...but I could talk all night about this stuff. Very early on, as I said earlier, I became chief engineer of the ship with 125 or 150 men under me within three months. And my commanding officer had to go over to COMDESPAC [*Commander Destroyers Pacific*] and defend the position that he was taking a very junior ensign and making him the chief engineer. I was just barely twenty-one years old. And all these wonderful people. Very shortly, BUPERS [*Bureau of Personnel*] came out and asked for recommendations for commissioning enlisted personnel, maximum grade lieutenant junior grade. We recommended this Chief Brown for lieutenant junior grade and gave his credentials. The bureau came right back and commissioned him a lieutenant commander and made him the chief engineer of a APA

[*attack transport*]. And that's the last I heard of him. I'm sure he's long dead now, 'cause he was very old at that time, for destroyer service.

DD: So these senior and experienced enlisted, they're advising you or I mean...

FB: Well, both. I would say mostly just going ahead and doing their jobs. They knew their jobs and I very rapidly got to know the paperwork and how to make things go. I'm not trying to pin a halo on me or anything like that. But I became very old and very experienced very damned fast and those guys were a part of forming me and I would hope that I had a part in forming them. In any event, we were very successful.

DD: Yes you were. That morning, you're the only engineer officer. What other officers are aboard the ship?

FB: Well, the first lieutenant was Frank MAN-COW-SKI. He was also an ensign but if there's seniority among ensigns, he was senior to me by about a year. And the gunnery officer, [*A.L. Shephard*] the guy who had put me in hack. He was a lieutenant and thus next to god in the destroyer navy of that time. He was out of the [*Naval Academy*] class of 1933. You know, within two years he was a captain and so on, so forth. And that was about it.

DD: So you're giving reports to the gunnery officer then?

FB: Yes.

DD: He was taking command?

FB: Yes.

DD: Yeah.

FB: Effectively he had command 'til the captain and the exec got aboard and they—the attack was long over before they got back to the ship. I don't remember distinctly just when they did get aboard 'cause I was busy. But I'm sure that it probably was ten or ten-thirty by the time they got there. And then I guess there's a part I'd like to add here, if I may.

DD: Please.

FB: We had the ship ready to go around noon. And that was kind of a remarkable performance [*be*]cause, as I said, we were on cold iron and we had to get all that stuff put back together. And there again, that crew knew how to operate. They had to do all this on cold iron with just battle lanterns and so on and so forth. Eventually we were ready to go. The captain and exec were back. And one of the things that happened was that a midget submarine, when the garbage scow went out that morning—and this [*is*] all [*now*] history—the anti-submarine net had to be opened to let the [*duty minesweepers to enter,*] and a Japanese midget submarine came in. This is another remarkable thing that happened. There were some enlisted men on the *Curtiss* [AV-4], which was moored somewhere around the entrance to [*Middle*] Loch. And they saw the periscope of that guy coming in and they took a shot at him. And evidently they hit him. Now there's some dispute about what happened next in there and...

[Note: The anti-submarine net at the entrance to Pearl Harbor was opened at 0458 to permit the two duty minesweepers USS Condor (Amc-14) & USS Crossbill (Amc-9) to enter Pearl Harbor, the net remained open until 0840.]

END OF TAPE ONE

TAPE TWO

FB: Fire away. Well, so I was called to the bridge and it was the commodore who wanted to see me and he indicated this submarine was down in the channel, west of Ford Island. And we were under orders to drop a depth charge on it. What he wanted me to do was to get in the motor whaleboat with a whaleboat crew and a twenty-five pound depth charge and go drop that on that submarine.

Well, I'm very junior and he is a very senior commander, but I'm saying, "Well sir, I really would like those orders in writing 'cause I think that's death!"

Fortunately at that time, [*although*] I didn't know much about ordnance, I knew that much about it. About that time, our commanding officer came on the bridge and he was very strong person and he said, "Oh, by god none of my officers are going to do anything idiotic like that," speaking to his senior, the commodore.

It was finally agreed—fortunately the commanding officer was an ordnance post-graduate—, [*that*] we would not put the depth charge on the whaleboat, but that I would go out [*in the whaleboat*] and sit over the submarine [*as a marker --*] over those bubbles coming up -- and that [*the ship would drop the*] depth charge off the stern. [*The depth charge was*] put on top of the stern racks, [*with*] a lanyard [*attached*] to the pressure cap, which [*was*] hack sawed about two-thirds of the way through, and a [*long*] cable attached to it. The [*plan*] was this; the motor whaleboat with me [*and a two-man crew*] in it would be the buoy that the captain could see as he came down the fairway. When he was sure he had spotted the point where this was, he would blow the whistle and we in the motor whaleboat would head for Ford Island. [*Upon the skipper's order, the depth charge would be rolled off the rack and the torpedoman*] would pay out [*the*] lanyard, [*(our long)* wire],

and try to plunk [*the*] depth charge up against [*the*] miniature submarine.

Well, that's exactly the way it worked. I don't know the records but I would swear that to this day, [*the Case*] went the fastest anybody had ever steamed inside Pearl Harbor. She was making turns for twenty-six knots as [*she*] came down the fairway. When the captain had spotted where we were, he blew the whistle and we hauled for Ford Island. [*The ships*] went over [*the spot and*] dropped that depth charge, [*On signal the torpedoman*] pulled the lanyard and the whole bottom of Pearl Harbor went right up over [*us. A great deal of*] mud and debris came down in the motor whaleboat. We had a surge, of course, but we didn't get killed. Later on, [*when*] we got back [*into Pearl Harbor a*] a few weeks later, they [*had*] pulled that [*midget*] submarine up out of there. It was mangled up like you'd [*mangle*] a tin can. It was at the sub base for a good part of the war. We were in and out from time to time [*both in the Case*] and [*later*] on [*another*] ship. That submarine was a tangled mess. Eventually they built a sea wall at the sub base and pushed that submarine in as part of the backfill against the sea wall. And that's the end of that story.

DD: That's a good story. Who was the commodore? What was the name of the commodore? Do you recall?

FB: A. M. Bledsoe, I'm sure. Remarkable thing, he later made admiral. (Laughs)

DD: This—I'm sorry.

FB: Ah, just some funny things happened.

DD: Sure.

FB: I eventually, did fifteen years in the regular navy and went through flight training and flew in the Korean War and finally after all the sea to sea to sea to sea to sea stuff, I had other responsibilities and I resigned my regular commission and did another eighteen years in the reserve and retired as a captain. That's that.

DD: And we're very grateful.

FB: Yeah.

DD: I'm not ready to end the interview yet unless...

FB: Fire away!

DD: Okay.

FB: I've got sea stories 'til they won't quit.

DD: That's fine. All the better. This, one, as I said, as the top of the whole session, we're doing this in support of the National Park Service.

FB: Yes.

DD: And for the [*USS*] *Arizona* Memorial. And in as much as it is for the [*USS*] *Arizona* Memorial, you're one of the eyewitnesses to that devastating explosion.

FB: I definitely am that.

DD: You've given a brief description. What went through your mind when you saw that? You saw the plane, you saw the bomb and then that...

FB: It just—well, I want to say [*it was*] devastating, but it didn't stop my actions. I don't know. God, this is not desirable, to say the least. But everyone was trying to do his best. And I was trying to do my best. And I realized it was a bad, bad situation. And as, trying to answer in a general way, I was just horrified to see this happening. I didn't see anything—well, war went on and on and on and on, I didn't see anything as spectacular until later in the war and in another ship. We were firing at Saipan and we hit a Japanese ammunition dump. And this tremendous explosion went up. Well, it was comparable in a way, but the devastation and the horror of the *Arizona* was more so. It was comparable but not as great.

The whole—well, that explosion occurred in a ship in water. And water being noncompressible, you get an immediate tremendous shock. And that whole hull of the *Arizona* just shook for many seconds. It lifted up out of the water, in my perception, somewhat and then [*sank*] down and all this debris and stuff and bodies and went up. You can't help being pretty impressed with that. As you said, being a little guy from the Midwest, you don't see that every day out on the farm. So that's that.

DD: I thought the depth charging of the midget sub was very interesting. You proceeded on to Ford Island from—that was the plan, as I recall? You...

FB: Not on to Ford, past, on the western side of Ford Island. See, we're then going past the *Raleigh*—trying to roll over but held up by some buoys—the *Utah* had rolled over, the *Detroit* had moved, as I recall it. And we're barreling—now, we were talking now it's [*after*]noon. I don't remember the time exactly. The ship's log would say that. And here comes the *Case*. I'm sitting in that motor whale boat out there with an engineer and a coxswain and the *Case* comes barreling down, making twenty-six knots right for us. And dropped

that charge and boy, it was only, as I remember, the charts would show it, but maybe twenty-five to thirty feet of water. And that darn charge [went] off everything and the bottom came up and...

[Note: The USS Case deck log states 1655 Underway to clear harbor. 1715 dropped a depth charge on sunken enemy submarine between buoys 5 and 7, 1730 stopped lying off Coal dock. Darkened shi., 1900 Commenced circling Ford Island conduction underwater sound listening search.]

DD: So then you were recovered back aboard...

FB: Oh sure.

DD: Okay.

FB: Yeah, they picked us up and we went to sea. No, we didn't go to sea. We were then assigned that night to just patrol around and around and around Ford Island. Because, of course, there was a fear then of submarines. And of course, we all at that point—now this is a very distinct memory. We all assumed that the Japanese landing force was directly behind their carrier forces and the landing would occur within hours. Of course then what happened was the—well, it was after dark. The [USS] *Enterprise* [CV-6] came in and they sent their air group in and that was very tragic thing, where several planes shot down and we were witnesses to that. We didn't fire anything, but there were those who did. They shot down some of our own guys. Not very happy occurrence. And that's what we did that night.

[Note: Of the six VF-6 pilots flying F4F's from USS Enterprise's Ford Island Naval Air Station on the night of 7 DEC 1941, three were killed when their aircraft were shot down by friendly fire.]

DD: Mm-hmm. Regarding that...

FB: Yeah.

DD: ...and it's, I heard the testimony earlier this week from one of the, the lone survivor of that *Enterprise*...

FB: Oh yeah.

DD: ...squadron that came and tried to make it back to Hawaii. What was the command and control of the situation here that, you know, how would it have been that *Case* didn't fire when so many other batteries did open up and...

FB: I don't think I'm equipped to answer that other than our commanding officer was a very well disciplined individual. And it just wouldn't happen.

DD: Mm-hmm.

FB: As I remember, we didn't even go to general quarters. But at the same time, there were a lot of jitters and earlier in the day, a lot of the firing that occurred was before the ships or stations actually went to general quarters. I, my memory could be wrong in this but if I'm not mistaken, our after machine-gunners started firing on those Japanese planes before we actually sounded general quarters. It's certainly true that the *Curtiss*—well, I believe this to be true. Of course, I wasn't on the *Curtiss* but I'm all but positive that the *Curtiss* gun crew—it was, I think, a five-inch gun crew—fired on that midget submarine and they weren't at general quarters at that time. Now you could say that's a lack of discipline or you could say that it's a highly alert crew, belying some of the things that are said about, "Oh, we're too relaxed." We're all in the bin or whatever, but the *Enterprise* thing was extremely unfortunate. It's too bad.

DD: I'd like to hear briefly, if you'd care to, what are some of your other memories of either that day, that weekend, that week or even the war, for that matter. If there's something that you would like preserved for posterity, some...

FB: Well, we—yes, there are, naturally, there are some things. We were on convoy duty back and forth to the States for some time. The whole fleet was in a defensive posture until we're approaching the time of the Battle of Midway and, boy, we were all very alert as to what was coming. We knew the big show was there.

At the time of the Battle of Midway, before the battle, we—or as it was approaching—say around the end of May or the first of June, if I remember correctly, we were in Pearl Harbor and anticipating what was going to happen and now in retrospect, knowing some of the intelligence efforts that went on, we and our sister ship, the *Reid* [DD-369]—now, you have to understand, our division and our squadron was shattered at that time. The *Shaw* was in our division. It was blown up. The *Cassin* [DD-370] and the *Downes* [DD-375] which were ahead of the *Pennsylvania* [BB-38] in the big dry dock, were ruined. And so, and shortly thereafter the *Tucker* [DD-374] got in trouble, which was in our division, so we then had a two-ship division, namely the *Case* and the *Reid*, our sister ship.

We were ordered to go up to Alaska to be somewhat of an offset to the northern feint that the Japanese planned, but en route we were to pick up, between us, a battalion of Marines and take them to Midway. So that's what we did and we had Marines all over the place. I mean we had Marines in the fireroom and the engine room and all over the place. And had to feed 'em en route and so on, but we dropped them off at Midway [*Island*] and then proceeded up to the Aleutians, to offset that, and that was a crazy darn deal up there. We had two fleet destroyers and the *Indianapolis* [CA-35] and

then a bunch of old yachts, [*tugs, barges,*] floating grocery stores [*etc.*] and whatever they had out there.

And so we were in Makushin Bay on Unalaska, waiting for the Japanese landing force to come in and we were to be a suicide squad. The Japanese planes flew over us to attack Dutch Harbor and we thought they didn't see us. But they saw us. After the war, at the war college, I saw the pictures that they took of us sitting down there, with steam up to the throttles and I'm glad they never tried to land.

Things went on from there. We were down in the Solomons, in the Guadalcanal campaign. There's one little aspect there that—I know I'm meandering but I don't think history recognizes that this [*was*] a very desperate time for the Brits. And when the *Saratoga* [CV-3] had been hit and we lost the [*USS*] *Wasp* [CV-7, on September 15, 1942 southwest of the Solomon Islands] and we're down trying to suffer along down there on Guadalcanal, the British sent the [*H.M.S*] *Victorious*, an aircraft carrier, over to help us. And I've often thought, by god, that's not always recognized. In fact, I haven't heard anybody else say that. We were down to one carrier down there and we were desperate. The British sent a carrier over that they desperately needed but gave us a hand. And I'm not always saying that about the Brits either, but they did on that occasion.

And then it was on to new construction, new ship. And it was Saipan and the Philippine Sea Battle. And then—shoot, can't even remember—Pelelieu, which was a desperate thing. And I think back on that and think why the hell did we take that place? It never was used strategically or tactically for anything. Marine Corps lost a lot of good guys. And eventually it all came to an end. That's it.

DD: Thank you very much. Thank you for the interview. Thank you for your service, very much.

END OF INTERVIEW